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1ST INFANTRY DIVISION GETS BIG-AS-TEXAS WELCOME FROM TOWN THAT BOUGHT QUILT SHE MADE FOR CHARITY

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SONORA, Texas — Sonora has once again proven that it is a great community full of caring people that have hearts as big as Texas.



PHOTO COURTESY STORIE SHARP

Sgt. Nicole Smith of V Corps' Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 121st Signal Battalion, 1st Infantry Division (seated at center, with glasses) poses with the 24 citizens of Sonora, Texas who pooled together nearly \$10,000 to buy the division memorial quilt seen in the background, which Smith made in Iraq. The quilt was auctioned on e-bay for a charity fund for children of division Soldiers killed on duty. While on leave in the U.S. Smith personally delivered the quilt to Sonora.

On Wednesday, November 10, local citizen John K. Wilson was watching Fox News when a story caught his attention. A young lady, Sgt. Nicole Smith, serving in Iraq with V Corps' 1st Infantry Division, had made a quilt and was going to auction it off to assist the children of fallen Soldiers from the 1st Infantry Division.

This was no ordinary quilt -- this was a piece of art made from her bed sheets and pieces of materials that are signed by senior ranking officers and NCOs (including the three generals of the division and the division command sergeant major) the

Governor of Tikrit, the Governor of Dyala and many more. Many soldiers even donated the patches from their uniforms to be sewn into the quilt.

The auction was reported to be on e-bay and would end on November 11, 2004 – Veteran's Day.

Quick thinking got Wilson moving, and he began contacting friends who might be interested in donating to such a cause. It only took 26 phone calls to get 24 people committed to bid.

Lolabeth and Cleve T. Jones were among the group, and volunteered to commandeer the bidding portion of the project. Lolabeth said it was right up to the last minute, and someone placed a bid over Sonora's. Refusing to lose, Lolabeth took a leap of faith that she could get the additional funds and she placed the winning bid -- \$9,500.

Lolabeth was correct in her assumption that the funds would be raised and soon she was in contact with Smith, letting her know that a check was on the way.

Smith was more than overwhelmed. She had thought the quilt might bring a \$1,000 or so, but she never dreamed it would bring almost \$10,000. The Sonora donors were just as excited about obtaining the quilt, and a friendship soon formed between Smith, John K. and Lolabeth. As luck would have it, Smith was going to be on leave in the United States during Thanksgiving and decided that she would personally deliver the special quilt to our little community.

Smith and her mother left their home in Pennsylvania and arrived in Sonora on Friday, December 3.

They made their grand entrance at the "The More the Merrier" Christmas Bazaar, where she was greeted with news cameras and many curious and excited visitors. Carrying a large black duffel bag, Smith limped into the center of the room, and slowly unpacked the piece of history.

Smith and her mom had a whirlwind tour of our little community while they were here. After visiting with new friends at "The More the Merrier," they woke up early Saturday for interviews and a trip to a real Texas ranch.

A special welcome reception was held at The Church of the Good Shepherd on Saturday, for all the donors and interested parties to visit with Smith and see the quilt. E.M. Hobbs quickly built a display rack to showcase the work of art, allowing both sides to be viewed without handling the precious piece. While here, Smith signed some extra squares that weren't used for the final piece and gave them to the generous donors, James and Diane Benson, Buck and Susan Bloodworth, L.P. Bloodworth, Bob and Nancy Brockman, Keith and Rosie Butler, Cam and Erika Campbell, Jimmy and Diana Condra, Ronnie and Alice Cox, Nancy Davis, Monty and Sam Dillard, Edward and Carolyn Earwood, Jim and Margrett Garrett, Rusty and Carla Garner, Mike and Debra Hobbs, Max and Jimmie Howorth, Claire Jones, Cleve T. and Lolabeth Jones, George and Donna Keese, Bruce and Jessie Kerbow, Wanda Neville, Ben and Lenora Pool, Jim and Betty Stephen, Charlotte Wilson, and John and Karen Wilson.

With the quilt is a book which chronicles the process of the project and thoughts from Smith as she worked on it. Very special letters explain some of the stories that go along with the quilt. Many of the pages are handwritten, making it even more special for those who get to look through it.

Smith shares the following on the project:

"April 2004 was the birth of this quilt. I started by placing the blocks into a pattern. This took about five days and a lot of trial and error to get the final design.

"I used a queen size bed sheet for the border, and the back is a sheet that was issued to me when I was stationed at Fort Hood, Texas with the 16th Signal Battalion in 1995. This sheet was laid out at the Tikrit Forward Operating Base Danger Morale, Welfare and Recreation Sports Bar, for about four months. Many soldiers passing thru signed it.

"A few of the patches are sewn on by hand. The units were really great in giving up their patches. A few are actually combat patches, meaning the Soldiers took them off the uniforms they were wearing.

"I chose the backwards flag because we are in a combat zone, and we wear the flag backwards to represent that we are running into battle not away; the 1st Infantry Division patch because it is dedicated to the 1st Infantry Division; the Iraq flag because we are in Iraq, and the Red Cross patch because they are vital to the armed forces not just in Iraq, but all over the world.

"The stuffing is raw cotton that the tailor provided. When I say the cotton is raw, I had to shake the seeds out of it and I had to pick out the stems that were in it. I had brought Dawn dish detergent with me, so I hand washed the cotton with that, laid it out to dry, and being that the water is not so good, I used bottled water on it."

A very special memory that Smith shared is of the Iraqi (Kurdish) tailor, Ayob Homa, who helped her with the embroidery and some of the sewing, and his wife, Hand Homa. When Homa found out that Smith was going to auction the quilt to raise money for the children of fallen Soldiers, he stopped charging her for his assistance and talents. He felt that it was an honor to assist with such a project. He said he loved the Soldiers who came into the shop to leave their patches or add to the signatures for the quilt and he took great care with all of his sewing on the quilt.

On November 6, Homa and his wife were killed by insurgents for assisting the Americans. They left behind a 1-year-old baby.

In a special note to the citizens of Sonora, Smith said, "I hope you enjoy this quilt as much as I have enjoyed making it. It was fun and helped the days pass. And I know that there will be some child who will benefit from the money you spent on this. I thank you very much!"

With many of our own loved ones serving in Iraq, the quilt touches each and every resident of Sutton County in a special way and makes it more precious than any amount of money. The group of donors who purchased the quilt has decided to share the quilt with as much of the nation as they can. A challenge has been placed for other communities to match or beat the \$9,500 for the children of the fallen Soldiers of 1st Infantry Division, and have the opportunity for the quilt to be displayed in

their town. The group hopes more money will be raised for the cause, and more will be able to share in the experience of having a piece of history in their hometowns.

If you would like to see the quilt, it is currently on display at The Bank & Trust.

